DESIGN Q AND “THE BEST VIEW IN THE SKY”

News / Business aviation

Howard Guy, CEO of UK-based Design consultancy Design Q, smiles when asked “what were the biggest challenges?” The question relates to Design Q’s mission to create a whole new experience for seasoned and discerning travellers that is at once exhilarating, wondrous, and like nothing else on earth.

Howard goes on to explain that Design Q have been working with the manufacturers of Airlander, HAV, on a new concept in luxury travel. Airlanderis a unique aircraft. The technology has been derived from a military programme which means that the aircraft can stay aloft for long periods of time and can travel very slowly or even hang in the sky. These characteristics mean that slow travel takes on a whole new meaning – where the journey is a series of experiences and just as important as the destination itself.

So what is this new concept? “As you can see from the accompanying images, Design Q have designed a ‘stateroom for the sky’, called Airlander 10. It nestles in the belly of Airlander giving the operators the ability to create a bespoke space for discerning guests, from the ultimate honeymoon in the *Royal Suite*, to an extended family gathering of up to

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18 persons. The cabin is infinitely variable and can be modular depending upon demand. It features several luxury spaces in addition to the *Royal Suite*; multiple *Private Horizon Suites*, an extensive *Infinity Suite*offering unrivalled comfort, not forgetting the *Altitude Bar* – possibly the coolest the place in the world to enjoy your sundowners as the world slips by, very slowly, beneath your feet. The Airlander 10 offers unprecedented horizon-to-horizon views.

Stephen McGlennan, CEO of HAV, comments that Airlander 10 is changing the way we think about air travel. “Airlander challenges people to rethink the skies – that’s the driving force behind everything we do,” he says. “Air travel has become very much about getting from A to B as quickly as possible. What we’re offering is a way of making the journey a joy.” Airlander 10 can take off and land from virtually any flat surface, eliminating the need for traditional infrastructure like ports or airports. This opens up opportunities for luxury expeditions to places existing transport can’t get to and offers the ultimate in transformative, experiential travel.

What makes you so excited about this project Howard? “We love doing different things. We have a fantastic team of young designers who never cease to surprise me with their ideas and creativity. They relish the opportunity to do something no one’s done before, to imagine a new concept and then to get into the detailed design of what this space will be”.

“Design Q have become synonymous with fresh new cabins in the aerospace world. Although my business partner and I started our design careers in the studios of Jaguar, the English sports car company, we have spent much of the last 20 years using our automotive skills to bring new concepts and levels of luxury to the jet world”.

How did your work in Aerospace come about? “Our breakthrough contract was designing Virgin Atlantic’s revolutionary Upper Class cabin back in 2003 which pioneered the angled seating areas and the flat bed combination that was very space efficient and re-wrote the rule book for business class travel.”

“Our work with some major carriers then triggered a long and fruitful relationship with Bombardier

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Aerospace which started with the design of their Global flight deck in 2005. That project set new standards for cockpit comfort as we integrated high end industrial design. Our design collaboration on the Challenger 350 in 2012 has helped it to become the world's best-selling business jet of all time, so yes, get the design to excite and inspire the customers you target and it sells itself. Nothing better illustrates how good design sells products, get that right and investment in design is repaid multiple times."

"More recently Aerion commission Design Q to design their supersonic AS 2 and this development is progressing and reopens the exciting prospect of flying supersonic, so Design Q have helped design the fastest and most expensive business aircraft to date, and now with Airlander, Design Q are responsible for the interior of the largest flying luxury craft in the world! So as you can see, we've become the go-to design consultancy for this type of work".

Back to Airlander 10, Howard goes on to say "the closest analogy I can think of is, imagine *The Orient Express*in the sky, that level of opulence and luxury, but with the ability to get absolutely anywhere in the world, from Antarctica to the plains of Africa, to float about the mountains of Patagonia, or the glories of the Amazon. You are not constrained by where the rails take you, or a timetable, it gives you the freedom to go anywhere you desire."

"Design Q has particular expertise in luxury product design. For example; how the materials and the finishes convey excellence, and similarly the colours and finishes we have appointed for the interior are all high-end finishes. Luxury is about nurturing the senses, providing delight by thoughtful touches down to the tiniest detail. Designed to be relaxing, the real wood flooring and the Tai Ping silk carpets lift the interior to a class of its own. The sofas, generous in proportion for total relaxation and with the unique ability to rotate, allow perfect outward vision through the massive panoramic windows, or they can turn to face inwards for evening social events."

"Luxury also is about the space and the freedom of space, allowing free movement and seclusion if required. In contrast a commercial aircraft, even in business class or first class, the space you get is not commensurate with the expectation or the ticket price. Space is at an absolute premium, unlike Airlander 10."

"Perhaps the ultimate experience is to sip sun-downers in the *Altitude Bar*as you float slowly over icebergs and glaciers, or perhaps the Victoria Falls, or even a cityscape like Manhattan. Does it get any better than that?" Howard asks with a chuckle.

Who is the Airlander 10 designed for? Howards smiles again and says, "the discerning private individual who has enjoyed his jet and private yacht for many years, but is looking for something new and different, something that will give him and his guests unique access to remote parts of the world, to enjoy "slow travel" that enables truly amazing views of our planet. Similarly, we envisage luxury travel companies will be equally keen to offer their well-heeled clients this unique travel experience. We think the modularity of Airlander 10 will offer the flexibility such bespoke travel companies are looking for".

So what are the next steps? "Well, having announced Airlander 10 at Farnborough 2018, along with the images that my team have created, we are now working closely on finalising the production design with the Airlander engineering team and we anticipate having further exciting news in the next few months. I can't say anymore at this stage, suffice to say, watch this space!"

And with that Howard's PA is hovering in the doorway, he has to go to his next client meeting. He's clearly a man in demand.

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